

THE NEED OF A CLASSIFIED AND
NON-PARTISAN CENSUS
BUREAU.

Second Report of the Special Investigating Committee

OF THE

National Civil-Service Reform League.

December, 1898.

THE CENSUS BUREAU.

TO THE NATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE REFORM LEAGUE:

Your Special Investigating Committee, which examined, among other things, the question of the desirability of classifying the Census Bureau, begs leave to report as follows:

On March 16th last, Senator Chandler introduced a bill for taking the twelfth and every subsequent census. Section 3 of the bill provided that the employees of the Census Bureau should be appointed according to the provisions of the Civil Service Act. The bill was referred to the Census Committee, and when it was reported Section 3 was stricken out, and a provision substituted that the employees should be appointed "according to the discretion of the Director of the Census, subject to such examination as said Director may with the approval of the Secretary of the Interior prescribe, and not otherwise."

The purpose of the Committee's substitute is to repeat the unfortunate experience of the last census in making the clerks and the employees of the office subject to political patronage. We desire to call attention to the evils which have resulted from this course, in

- 1st: The increased extravagance of the Bureau;
- 2d: The demoralization of the force employed;
- 3d: The worthlessness of a census so taken.
- 4th: The lack of public confidence in its accuracy and impartiality.

I.

The last census cost \$10,620,000 (Cong. Record, December 16, 1897, page 214). The amount paid for salaries alone was \$5,120,000. Mr. Carroll D. Wright, Chief of the Department of Labor, who had charge of the last Census Bu-

reau for some years after the retirement of Mr. Robert P. Porter, as Superintendent, estimates that two million dollars and more than a year's time would have been saved if the Census force had been brought into the classified service. (Letter of Carroll D. Wright to Henry Cabot Lodge, Record of December 16, 1897, page 174.) Mr. Wright adds: "I do not hesitate to say that one-third of the amount expended under my own administration was absolutely wasted, and wasted principally on account of the fact that the office was not under Civil Service rules. . . . In October, 1893, when I took charge of the Census Office, there was an office force of 1,092. There had been a constant reduction for many months and this was kept up without cessation till the close of the census. There was never a month after October, 1893, that the clerical force reached the number then in office; nevertheless, while these general reductions were being made and in the absence of any necessity for the increase of the force, 389 new appointments were made."

That is, new appointments were made to a force where they were not needed, the new men replacing experienced clerks, and, in the words of Senator Lodge, "filling the office with beginners at the close of the work." This was manifestly done because these appointments were allowed to be political.

Mr. Porter disputes the estimate of Mr. Wright that the waste was as much as two million dollars from this cause alone. But whatever the precise amount, it was certainly very large; so large that it is the manifest duty of Congress to see that it does not occur again.

II.

In respect to the demoralization and inefficiency of a force selected upon the patronage plan, Mr. Porter himself now concedes the necessity of placing the Census Bureau in the classified service. For, in his article in the *North American Review* of December, 1897, he enumerates among the faults of the present system the following:

“Placing upon the shoulders of the Superintendent, whose mind should be fully occupied with his experts in planning the work, the responsibility of the appointment of an office force of several thousand clerks.”

Mr. Porter suggests as a remedy:

“Making the Census a permanent office of the Government and applying to it precisely the same rules and regulations as to the employment of clerical help that are in vogue in the other Departments. If this were done,” he says, “special Civil Service examinations might be held for the work prior to the time the clerk would be needed, and the Census Office would then have a sufficiently large eligible list to draw from. In 1890 I accepted Civil Service examinations of the higher grades, but that did not do away with the necessity of examining 2,700 clerks in the office, and this with the work of appointment, literally took up all the time of the Superintendent, whose mind should have been free for his purely statistical duties. . . . And then why transform the Census Office at its busiest season into an examination department for clerks, and the Director of a vast scientific investigation into a dispenser of political patronage. It is simply unjust to such an official. Having passed through the ordeal once, I am satisfied that the other way is more practical and in the end will be better for all concerned.”

This declaration of Mr. Porter's experience is timely, if it will prevent the repetition of such a calamity.

Congressmen were advised systematically of the number of positions at their disposal. Mr. Porter, kept regular books of account, charging each of the Congressmen with the number of appointments made at his request. Our Chairman has recently examined two of these books. In one of them, the appointments are classified according to States, and in another they are charged to the particular Congressman who solicited them. The latter book is a ledger of over four hundred pages. At the head of each page appears the name of the Congressman charged with the appointments. In the left hand column are the numbers of the files containing the recommendations and credentials. Then follow the names of the appointees, and then the grades and salaries. By means of this book the relative rights of members of Congress could be adjusted, and it could be seen at a glance whether any particular member had overdrawn his account. After a Congressman retired, the clerks appointed by him held their places by a precarious tenure, and frequently, perhaps generally, had to make way for persons appointed

and protected by the influence of his successor, or some other Congressman, for in this ledger, following the accounts kept with existing Congressmen (a page to each) is the list of the appointees of ex-Congressmen all thrown together, as though to be the subjects of early decapitation. We are informed that there are other books of the same character as this ledger, in the Census Office, covering other periods of time.

It would be hard to find a better illustration of the working of the patronage system than is presented by this book, where appointees are classified as in a live-stock register as the property of particular Congressmen, but without reference to their records and individual qualifications. We frankly and gladly recognize the fact that there are members of Congress who did not approve this debasing system, and who will not now.

Patronage of this kind does not secure the political advantage which is supposed to be its object, for the most severe defeat ever sustained by the party then in power, occurred at the close of the very year that these appointments were parcelled out among the representatives of that party in Congress.

Mr. Porter testified that the appointees were, as a rule, recommended by Republicans. This rule, however, was not universal. There were Democrats who received a share of the appointments; perhaps where their votes in Congress were serviceable upon appropriation bills or otherwise. With this system of log-rolling in force it is not hard to understand how the enormous appropriations for taking the last census amounting to \$10,620,000 were secured. Indeed, Mr. Porter stated some time since to our Chairman that if he had it to do again, he would select his clerks by Civil Service examinations, "even though the other plan *had* greatly smoothed the way to the passage of appropriations and other friendly legislation."

The plain English in regard to such transactions is that such legislation was bought with offices, and that the salaries of these offices were paid for out of the people's money. It was the people's money which paid for the keeping of the very books in which these transactions were recorded. Under such a system extravagance was a necessary result.

What was the character of the service under this patronage system? Shortly before Mr. Wright took charge of the Bureau

a large number of discharges of those then holding positions were made, on account of their lack, not only of ability, but of moral character. Doubtless there were many excellent persons who secured employment by patronage methods, but it was in spite of this system of barter and corruption, by which the places in this Bureau were filled. Under the competitive system it is at least impossible that applicants will get their places *because* of corruption or immorality. When appointed through favoritism this is not seldom *the very reason* for their appointment. Moreover, when a clerk or other employee owed his place to the favor of some Congressman, his loyalty was considered to be due, not so much to the Chief of the Bureau and to the public, as to the particular "influence" which secured the place. Removals from the Census Bureau even for just cause became difficult, therefore, and often impossible. Persons dismissed for inefficiency or misconduct, were actually reinstated against the will of the Chief of the Bureau himself, at the demand of some political friend, too powerful to be offended.

If the Census Bureau is not now put under a strict system of competitive examinations, the effect of the elections in 1900 must also be considered. Hardly will the Bureau have been put in running order before the campaign will have begun, and if the spoils system prevails the whole force will be affected by the political turmoil, connected first with the nominations for Congressmen and President, and then with the elections. Wherever the "influence" of the employee is defeated the employee himself will be discharged, while if a change of party ensures the whole Bureau will have to be reconstructed with untrained material at the most critical period of its work.

III.

The lamentable results of the patronage system are shown in the defective enumeration of inhabitants made in the last census. As a rule, the supervisors were chosen for political reasons, and the supervisors selected the enumerators. True, it was provided by law (Section 4, Act of March 6, '89) that the enumerators should be chosen for fitness and without reference to party affiliations, but this became impossible when the

supervisors were chosen for political reasons. The enumeration was perverted in many places into an information bureau for party candidates.

The supervisor at Buffalo, New York, addressed the following circular letter to his enumerators:

"OCTOBER 28, 1890.

"As it is of the utmost importance that a Republican member of Congress be elected in this district, I shall feel personally obliged if on the day of election you will work especially for Benjamin H. Williams, the Republican candidate.

[Signed]

SILAS H. DOUGLAS."

In Geneva, New York, Congressman Raines secured the appointment of enumerators with the view of enhancing his political fortunes. He addressed to one of them, and probably to many others, the following letter:

"MY DEAR SIR:—As it is quite likely that you will in a few days be appointed enumerator for your district, I write you this in the strictest confidence. I would like very much that you should take the trouble, before you make your report to the Supervisor of the Census, and after you have taken all the names in your district, to copy in a small book *the name and post office address of every voter* on the list. After you have done so, I wish you to send the book to me at Canandaigua. I ask you to do this as a personal favor, and to make no mention of the matter to anyone. What I want is a *full list of all the voters* in your enumeration district. Will you please treat this matter as strictly confidential?

"Very truly yours,

[Signed]

J. RAINES."

Mr. Raines stated to our Chairman that he had sent this letter in ignorance of the law, which required enumerators to keep secret the results of the enumeration. In many other cases, for instance, at Bloomington, Indiana, enumerators were chosen on the recommendation of the chairman of the Republican County Committee, and made poll lists for the Republican party.

The evils of patronage were clearly apparent in New York city. Charles H. Murray was made Supervisor of the Census. He wrote the following circular letter which shows his manner of selecting enumerators.

“DEAR SIR :—You will please forward to this office a list of the applicants that the Republican organization of your district desires to have named as Census enumerators. The list must be sent here on or before April 1st.”

General Walker who took the Ninth and Tenth Census says: “If the selection of the enumerators was made upon any such basis as that, the census could not have been otherwise than bad.” Many of the men thus appointed were utterly unfit. The Police Inspector named one, a thief, who had been three times an inmate of the State Prison, a man whose name was known to all the city detectives, whose picture was then in the Rogues’ Gallery, and whose dealings with the Census Bureau were under an alias; yet private houses were opened to him under Government endorsement.

New York was a Democratic city, and there was strong reason for believing that the count had been defective. The Police Department re-counted the city and found the population two hundred thousand greater than that showed by the federal census. The police count was sent to Washington where Mr. Kenney, its custodian, offered it for comparison with the census enumeration and a recount was asked, but refused. Then a copy of the federal census for the Second Ward was procured and compared with the police enumeration. The federal list contained 826 names, and the police enumeration 1,340 names,—a difference of 45 per cent. Affidavits were furnished showing the residence of 328 persons not enumerated in the federal census. Our Chairman inspected the police enumeration, as well as the federal census, and a comparison of the two lists, followed by a personal investigation in the Ward, indicated that great numbers of the residents of this ward were omitted in the census. There can be no doubt but that many thousands of inhabitants of New York were omitted from the census, and the patronage system was directly responsible for these omissions.

One of those engaged in the taking of this census thus describes some of the facts which came under his personal observation :

“In a section consisting at one time of twenty-one people who were engaged in the mailing department of the office,

addressing envelopes, mailing bulletins, and other duties incident to the mailing department, there were only four people, other than the chief of the section, who were available for any character of work whatsoever. Three clerks were absolutely demented; they were, by reason of being maimed, wholly unfit to be of any service; two by reason of disease (consumption), were valueless; two, being sons of chiefs of division in the office with a "pull," were immune; the other six were wholly worthless by reason of age or disinclination. It is but fair to say that this condition did not last throughout the period of the taking of the census. The larger number of these people, however, served more than two years, and several of them for a much longer period. It would seem that this particular section was the Botany Bay of the Eleventh Census, but the same state of affairs existed in a lesser degree throughout the office. It needs no argument to convince one that this state of affairs could not exist under the 'merit' system established under the civil service act and rules. Being appointed as skilled laborers, these people were not required to take an examination, although doing clerical work.

Another feature of the work of the Eleventh Census which makes clear to my mind that the next force should be selected from those who pass a competitive civil service examination was the exceedingly large percentage of errors made, particularly in the punching of cards. All of the data relating to the census were transferred from the original schedules to cards, each hole punched in a card representing some material fact, such as 'native born,' 'foreign parents,' 'white or colored,' etc., etc., in some cases as many as thirty or forty facts being indicated by punches on a single card. The symbol representing each condition or fact must be carried in mind, or else the progress of punching the cards would be so retarded as to make the electrical punching machines of little value. I think it will be readily conceded that a clerk doing this character of work should be a person of good mind as well as a skilled clerk.

There was at all times a 'Division of Revision and Results' in the office, consisting of a chief and from thirty to seventy of the best clerks obtainable. Notwithstanding this check upon error, it was found necessary to establish a section

of about seventy people to look after the errors of punching cards alone. Here we find as many as one hundred and forty people whose time was wholly devoted to correcting faulty work. Errors, of course, would unavoidably creep into a work of the magnitude of the Eleventh Census, but I believe that a careful selection of the clerks under the rules of the Civil Service Commission would have tended to minimize their number. Notwithstanding the 'Revision' division and the 'Error' section before spoken of, it was found at the very last moment before the publication of the final results that the work was so inaccurate that the portion of it relating to occupations (see report of Commissioner of Labor, in charge of Eleventh Census, June 30, 1895, pp. 4, 5) had to be subjected to still another revision, which delayed its publication for more than a year. The expense incident to this was great, owing to the fact that all other census work had been completed, and the office remained open only to complete that section of the report on 'Population, and Vital Statistics Relating to Occupation.'

Considerable stress is laid upon the fact that examinations were held in the office to test the fitness of clerks before they were employed. I beg to suggest that the highest number of clerks employed at any time numbered about 3,200. Of these, only about 1,700 were examined. The larger part of the working force of the office was, in point of fact, never subjected to an entrance examination. Only the high-grade clerks, namely, those from \$900 per annum up, were required to pass the entrance examination. It can be readily shown, as I suggested above, that the greater part of the clerical work was performed by what were termed 'skilled laborers,' who received \$600 per annum only, and were exempt from examination."

IV.

The census ought to be as free from partisan color as the Judiciary. Otherwise, no one can rely upon the accuracy of its conclusions. To gain the confidence of the people, it ought to be not merely fair and just, but free from even the appearance of corrupt or partisan influence.

If the government has a free choice between a non-political and a political agency for taking this enumeration, and chooses the latter, composed of officials of its own political faith, the presumption is against the fairness of a census so taken. And even if it were fair, many would not believe it to be fair. Suspicion is cast on such a census in advance of enumeration; and if, at the close of the work, inaccuracies are shown, resulting in some cases in advantage to the party by which it is taken, the work is sure to be discredited.

All of which is respectfully submitted with the recommendation that the efforts of the League be directed immediately toward gaining the support of the country and of Congress for the classification of the Census Bureau under the civil service rules.

(Signed)

WM. DUDLEY FOULKE,
Chairman.

CHARLES J. BONAPARTE.

RICHARD H. DANA.

HERBERT WELSH.

GEORGE MCANENY.

BALTIMORE, DECEMBER 15, 1898.



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